

Floored by his Success; Local Wood Flooring Company Grows with SBA Loan

Don't blame Bill Jopling if he is somewhat floored by all the success he is enjoying these days. Jopling is the president and owner of Wood Flooring International, a Delran-based company that supplies pre-finished and engineered exotic hardwood floors found in residential and commercial buildings throughout North America.

Jopling's love of wood started when he was attending the University of Vermont. He eventually dropped out to go into logging and operate his own woodworking shop. He and a partner would later start a company that specialized in un-finished hardwood flooring systems in Philadelphia.

However, Jopling realized that the market was becoming more sophisticated and moving towards pre-finished and engineered flooring systems. When his partner did not want to move in that direction, he left the company to start his own business.

"No one really wants their house torn up and the smell of polyurethane wafting through the air," said Jopling. "Why do that, when you can have a desired look by installing a pre-finished and engineered floor?"

So in 1998, Wood Flooring International was born. Jopling and one other person worked out of his Philadelphia home. By 2001, he and six employees moved in to an 11,500 square foot warehouse/office space in Delran. By the following year, the company had grown to fourteen employees and occupied the remaining 11,500 square feet of the building's space.

But Jopling will be the first to tell you that the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) was with him every step of the way. He credits a \$50,000 SBAExpress loan from PNC Bank that allowed him to go from first year sales of \$200,000 to \$3.7 million in sales in 1999.

"Everyday companies like Wood Floor International are taking advantage of the SBAExpress loan program," said SBA New Jersey District Director James A. Kocsi. "Small business owners may borrow up to \$350,000 under this program, which offers small business owners a revolving line of credit with a seven year maturity. The line of credit feature has become a favorite among our small business customers as working capital needs fluctuate and firms need the availability of a credit line to take advantage of business what opportunities



Floored by his Success---Bill Jopling, President of Wood Flooring International examines an engineered flooring system before it gets packaged. SBA loans helped him grow his business to 40 employees and annual sales of \$17 million.

that suddenly appear. Just look this loan program has done for Wood Flooring International."

According to Jopling, Wood Flooring International would later receive SBA loans of \$600,000 from PNC Bank and a \$1.2 million SBA loan from Commerce Bank to help with the company's rapid growth. Since that time, both loans have been paid in full.

Today, Wood Floor International has 40 employees with annual sales of \$17 million. The company works with a network of 50 distributors that put

Wood Flooring International's floors and other accessories in 1500 store throughout North America. "We deal with 30 species of wood," said Jopling. "We have eight collections and I travel the world looking for sources of wood and colors that will work."

Jopling finds himself traveling every month to places like Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Bolivia, Columbia,, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Zaire, China, Congo, Ghana, Italy and Austria in search of quality wood. "Every mill we work with we implement a quality control system there," said Jopling.

Some of the flooring systems come in Oak, Rosewood, Mahogany, Cypress, Cherry, Teak, Maple, and Chestnut, to name a few. The company has also added baseboards, moldings, and stair treads to their product line.

Jopling is also proud of his company's involvement with a recycling program that recycles walnut wood. Wood Flooring International is a partner with a California Walnut Orchard that takes old walnut trees that are unable to produce walnuts any longer and then recycles the wood into floors. Trees are then replanted in order to replenish parts of the 200,000 acres of perpetual Walnut orchards. The lifespan of a walnut tree is 50 years.

As for future trends, Jopling said, "Flooring is going fashionable. People want instant old. Hard scraping and antiquing are in vogue; make it a little old before its time."

Jopling has also established the Wood Floor Resource Group, which is dedicated to marketing Wood Flooring International products to the architectural design community. "We're targeting architects in major markets like New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and San Francisco," said Jopling.

Whatever Jopling and his staff are doing, it seems to be working. In May of 2005 the company is moving from its 23,000 square foot facility in Delran to a 125,000 square foot building in Burlington. "We plan to do a little manufacturing in the new facility," said Jopling. "We'll be able to make all of our display panels, as well as make moldings, and do some custom color work on flooring."

Wood Flooring International is poised for growth. According to Jopling, 2005 sales should near \$25 million. It's no wonder that the company was ranked number 10 in the Philadelphia Business Journal's 2000-2002 Fastest Growing Private Companies in Southern New Jersey. The company's success is nothing short of phenomenal. It's something that floors William Jopling everyday.